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my war with the CIA

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## *Sihanouk's War With CIA*

With the enemy knocking on the gates of Phnom Penh, Lon Nol's grudging acceptance of a conciliatory council has the look of a reform that has come too late.

Lon Nol is taking help where he can get it, and his belated agreement to readmit Sirik Matak to the leadership council is combined with some strenuous overtures to the Soviets. It is a crowning irony of Southeast Asia's complex diplomacy that a leader who wears the brand of an American puppet should reach for a lifeline from the Kremlin.

The Soviets have, it turns out, been just as wrong as the Americans in calling the turn on Cambodia. It was probably because they desired to accommodate President Nixon and lacked a clear view of the Cambodian peasant mentality. So they left Prince Sihanouk to the mercies of the Chinese with confidence that he would find no warmth in Peking. But Mao and Chou En-lai shrewdly treated the god-king like a prince while they enabled him to become an effective guerrilla leader.

So the actual hope now is not that Lon Nol's new council will manage to assert its authority over Cambodia. It is more realistic to hope that the council can become the instrument for a negotiated settlement which will yield a government with some balance in its future outlook. But even this may be wishful because Sihanouk has written that he will never enter "any coalition or other compromise" with the Lon Nol group.

Sihanouk supplies this and other timely insights in a new book called "My War with the CIA." While the prince writes with paranoiac intensity about the harassments he has allegedly suffered from American intelligence, he writes with the clarity of a brilliant politician about the forces at work in Cambodia and why the Nixon doctrine has not found this to be favorable terrain.

An important fact illuminated by the book is the resilient nature of Sihanouk himself. Originally enthroned by the French, who mistook him for a malleable lamb, he committed himself to the tradition of his namesake grandfather, a fervent champion of Cambodian independence. The passion of Sihanouk's ambition to keep his people free of foreign yokes is attested to by the major moves of his career.

This was why, after forcing out the French, he gave up the throne in 1955. He felt stifled by the sycophancy of court life and unable to lead or stimulate the nation. He eliminated the U.S. aid program in 1963 because he believed it was corrupting the people and impinging upon his options. He broke with the United States over a military encroachment on his territory and risked his standing with the North Vietnamese to protest their troops' use of his sanctuary.

He has pursued independence with a defiant spirit because his outlook, like his people's, has been shaped by 2,000 years of vulnerability. He seemed in 1971 to have

hurt his prospects of regaining power by relying on the North Vietnamese army. But he seems to have been vindicated by Lon Nol's far greater reliance on American bombers along with South Vietnamese and Thai soldiers. "Lon Nol has been," Sihanouk writes, "our best recruiting officer."

Sihanouk is not, by his own testimony, making his way back in order to serve as a Communist puppet. He writes of "neutrality with nuances" as his objective in foreign policy. This apparently means he will play the game as he did before his overthrow, larding his neutrality with manifestations of a clear preference for his strong Communist neighbors.

He wants to preside over a Socialist, egalitarian society which will not be Communist. He appears bent on recreating a social structure much like the one he left in 1970. He believes in private property for the pheasants and nationalization for industry. He will be wary of Japan's economic penetration because, as he writes, "the only real guarantee for maintaining non-alignment is to neutralize the forces of internal reaction."

This was the weakness of the faction on which the Americans and Soviets bet. It represented the forces of internal reaction. It was a poor choice, and its blatant failure makes it important to hope that the U.S. government, despite Sihanouk's allegations, had nothing to do with the machinations which brought it to power.